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ABSTRACT

Although some board members and superintendents may consider superintendent evaluation as potentially disturbing for their working relationships, such evaluations may become more appealing when considered as part of a broader system of school governance and management. What is needed is a performance appraisal system developed jointly by superintendents and board members. In recent years, such systems have been developed by the school board associations of both Illinois and New York. Potential benefits include allowing the board and superintendent to deal with differences at times other than during a crisis and forcing both parties to plan for the future. School boards and superintendents should research their own needs and aims and describe the kind of relationship they want rather than prescribe what other school systems have already adopted. Only after several years of commitment should a final written plan be agreed upon. In three Illinois communities--Park Forest, Bellwood, and Highwood-Highland--superintendent evaluation has led to numerous changes in policy, including reexamination of the grading system, minimum competency testing of students, and a new superintendent job description. The efforts of these communities exemplify the growing trend to approach superintendent evaluation as part of a larger process of goal setting, planning, and systemwide assessment. (JBM)

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

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Board & supt. share appraisal benefits

By Gerald R. Glaub

More than one board and superintendent have become jittery at the mere mention of evaluating the superintendent. The jitters usually result because neither party wants to upset their "working relationship." Boards, especially those that largely have neglected their policy-making role, often are unclear as to what the superintendent's evaluation should be based upon, and the superintendent is unclear as to the evaluation's objectives.

The jitters can subside, however, if the board has an evaluation plan that considers the superintendent's evaluation as part of a broader system for governance and management of the schools. This system recognizes that performance evaluation entails more than a once-a-year assessment of the superintendent. It recognizes that the board, in order to give a fair and comprehensive assessment of the superintendent's performance, has responsibilities it must fulfill, which include:

- establishing policies to give the superintendent direction for carrying out board objectives for the school system
- developing a job description for the superintendent that spells out his responsibilities
- developing, with the cooperation of the superintendent, a performance appraisal instrument to *measure* the superintendent's fulfillment of his responsibilities and the board's objectives.

While policies and the job description set down broad goals for the superintendent, the appraisal instrument should include an assessment for carrying out priorities for a specific school year.

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Too often, boards that have taken the time to develop policies and a job description to give the superintendent direction, have not taken the time to develop an adequate appraisal instrument to measure the superintendent's effectiveness. Although the superintendent knows what is expected of his performance, he has no idea whether he meets those expectations.

What is needed is not only an appraisal instrument, but a performance appraisal system—an evaluation plan developed by the superintendent and the board to which he is accountable.

More sophistication

Fading are the days of using quick and easy checklists that can be completed by a board member in 30 minutes—giving the superintendent little direction or encouragement in carrying out his responsibilities. Instead, boards are developing systems that are flexible, which may mean using a quick checklist or rating scale to get discussion of priorities and objectives rolling, but supporting this with written objectives and a written self-appraisal by the superintendent.

Several years ago, the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) developed and published materials to help boards develop a performance appraisal system that could be altered to fit the needs of individual school systems. The process, adapted also by the New York State School Boards Association, recommends that boards and superintendents sit down together to establish priorities, outcomes, and commitments—grounded in policies and the superintendent's job description—upon which to base the superintendent's evaluation. (See administrator's insert, "10 Steps Toward Performance Appraisal of the Superintendent.")

Before developing an appraisal system, a board must first ask itself what *benefits* it hopes to gain from evaluating the superintendent and what the *aims* of the evaluation will be. With benefits and aims determined, a board can meet with its superintendent to map out a rough appraisal plan before a final written form is developed.

The benefits

If the board is willing to expend its time and effort on a task as complex as superintendent evaluation, then its goal should be to accomplish something worthwhile. If evaluation of the superintendent doesn't provide some benefit or improvement—either in the performance of the superintendent or in the educational operations of the school system—boards lose enthusiasm and the idea of a superintendent's evaluation eventually may be abandoned.

Numerous potential benefits loom from superintendent evaluation. Without interfering in the daily operations of the schools, the board can reassure itself and the community that the schools are properly run. Probably no single approach to evaluation can capture all of the benefits, but here are some potential goals. Evaluation can:

- Help the board and superintendent agree on what is expected of each other, enabling the board to function as policy maker and the superintendent as chief executive.
- Help the board perceive its own performance more clearly.
- Encourage improved performance, helping the superintendent grow as demands of the job grow.
- Allow the board and superinten-

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dent to deal with differences at times other than during a crisis.
- Force the board and superintendent to plan for the future.
- Enable the board to make informed decisions about contract renewal and compensation.
- Provide a defense against the superintendent's critics.

Your board should pinpoint those benefits which it seeks to derive from its evaluation of the superintendent.

The aims

What you want evaluation to accomplish and how you're going to do it should be determined *before* you write it in policy. Policies don't cast ideas in stone; they can be changed, but you don't want to set down objectives that are likely to change soon. The objectives of the superintendent's evaluation that you write in your policy manual should reflect what your board really wants.

When it comes to policies and superintendent evaluation procedures, there is an unfortunate tendency to borrow from other school systems. There's nothing wrong with looking at how other systems do things. In fact, it's a good way to learn the broadest range of possibilities. Each school board, though, must think through its own needs and wants if superintendent evaluation is to have any value.

Unlike most other policy areas that are dominated by legal requirements, the relationship between the board and superintendent is controlled largely by local agreement. The board and superintendent are free to work out the kind of relationship they want. Board policies bearing on this relationship ought to *describe* the kind of relationship the board and superintendent want rather than *prescribe* what another school system has adopted to fit its needs.

If your board, then, is initiating superintendent evaluation—or intends to upgrade its current methods—you should delay writing detailed policies and procedures until you've thought through, researched, and tested a workable evaluation plan. For at least the first two or three years, policy should represent a *commitment* to evaluation, not a detailed plan for evaluation.

Boards *do* need to put their commitments into written policy, including their commitment to devote the time and effort necessary for superintendent evaluation. Nevertheless, the way in which the board carries out this commitment will evolve over a period of time as the board discusses and resolves the "Why do we want to evaluate the superintendent" question, as well as issues such as:
- What will we evaluate? Will it be the superintendent's personal traits and abilities? Will we look at the superintendent's performance and, if so, performance at doing what?
- How will we carry out evaluation? Will we use rating scales? Discussions aimed at consensus? Goals and objectives? How will we measure results?
- When will we evaluate the superintendent? How often will we meet? Will there be progress reports?

Eventually, of course, the evaluation "plan" must be put into some final written form. This form can include board policy, a separate plan document, and/or the superintendent's contract. (More and more superintendents want formal evaluation procedures written into their contracts as a guarantee that evaluation will be done.)

Viewing performance

As noted earlier, superintendent evaluation must be made an integral part of the board's policy-making and monitoring process, if it is to be worthwhile. It shouldn't be isolated from the board's other functions.

This message comes through loud and clear from the experiences of school systems using the IASB appraisal planning process.

The superintendent is the only staff member the school board can legitimately evaluate. His performance is a reflection of the entire system's performance, including the board's. To be fair, the board must examine the superintendent's performance in light of its own performance and the goals and objectives it has developed for itself. In addition, if the board uses policy to govern the system through its superintendent, then progress toward the board's goals depends almost entirely on what the superintendent does and how well he does it.

Constructive evaluation focuses on future growth and improvement rather than on the past. Of course, the superintendent needs to hear about both his triumphs and failures, but it's more important for him to know what the board expects in the future.

3 Illinois examples

Three school systems in Illinois that undertook the IASB planning process all have one thing in common today: Their superintendents are evaluated as part of a much larger process of goal setting, planning, and system-wide assessment.

In planning their appraisal systems, these three school boards decided that they wanted to function as policy makers and hold the superintendent accountable for managing the school system; and to evaluate the superintendent's performance of management responsibilities assigned by the board.

These boards then identified the specific management responsibilities they delegate to the superintendent by examining their own written policies and the superintendent's job description.

Once they had decided on what the superintendent does, they then reached agreement on how well he is expected to do it. They identified

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and wrote down "indicators of effectiveness"—results expected in carrying out a responsibility—for each of the superintendent's major responsibilities. For example, for the instructional program, an "indicator of effectiveness" or an expected result would be an increase in student test scores.

Finally, the boards wrote objectives—incorporating indicators of effectiveness—for all of those responsibilities where they wanted improvement on the part of their superintendents, the boards themselves, or any aspect of school operations.

In these school systems, board policy became more than a means to govern evaluation. Policy making also became one *result* of evaluation, as examining performance leads to the development of new goals and policies.

Appraisal interaction

How these boards and superintendents work together is reflected in the following examples:

In Park Forest, Ill., the superintendent of Rich Township High School District 227 is evaluated as part of a year-round process of planning and evaluation that involves teachers, parents, students, and others in setting goals for school system improvement. Goals recommended by a representative advisory group are studied by the board, which develops and adopts school system goals. These goals become the goals of Supt. James Warren, who makes regular progress reports to the board and community.

The superintendent delegates many of his goals to other administrators who have expertise in a particular area, such as curriculum. These administrators make progress reports to him. Some goals are delegated down the chain of command, even reaching the teacher. A committee of teachers, students, and administrators currently is re-examining the school system's grading system. Re-examination of the grading system was one of the board-adopted goals for this year.

Once each year, Warren provides the board with a self-appraisal of his performance that deals largely with board goals. Board members compile their own appraisals of his performance. Then all appraisals are discussed in executive session, focusing on such issues as: Did you achieve the goal we set? If so, to what extent and by what measure? If not, why not? Was the goal unreasonable? Were there conflicting priorities?

Issues unrelated to board-adopted goals can come up during formal evaluation, of course, and it probably is unwise to stifle them. Factors related to the superintendent's personal style or his performance of routine duties might be raised from time to time, especially by new board members. If important, such issues can be dealt with in new goals or objectives. Most boards find, however, that they rarely need to address routine performance issues after they have worked with the same superintendent for a few years or after they have addressed such issues once or twice in planning their evaluation systems.

In Bellwood, Ill., School District 88 five years ago began a search for a superintendent evaluation system that resulted in a series of policies concerning: program and staff evaluation, school board evaluation, and a year-round cycle of planning, reviewing, and reporting back to the board and community.

The school board in District 88 represents a multi-racial constituency in six suburban communities. Faced with potentially diverse values and wants, the board now has a process for reaching a reasonable consensus (community goal setting) and for feedback (evaluation). Supt. Harry Hayes notes that the board's policy on evaluation is brief, simply indicating that evaluation will be made annually, but the process is more than a one-shot affair.

Hayes initiates the evaluation process when he compiles a written appraisal of his own performance and submits it to the school board. This is the most time-consuming part of the process, he notes. He spends the equivalent of a full day preparing the self-evaluation and presenting it to the board. He and the board spend four to five hours reviewing his self-evaluation and reaching agreement on conclusions.

Each board member then prepares an independent evaluation of the superintendent's performance (which probably consumes one to three hours depending on the individual). The board and superintendent then meet for a final review of the independent evaluations, which takes about two hours. In all, Hayes devotes about 12 hours to the evaluation, and each board member devotes up to 10 hours.

The time is well spent, Hayes says, because the evaluation process affects all areas of board policy and all important aspects of school system operations. It has led, for example, to minimum competency testing of students and to a wide-ranging examination of curriculum standards.

The Bellwood board has surveyed citizens and is able to pass community goals on to teachers and principals through the goals it establishes for the superintendent. The evaluation process is where the board communicates those goals to the superintendent and monitors their progress.

In Highwood-Highland Park District 111, the school board went through the IASB evaluation planning process in 1976 and repeated the process last year. As a result, the board annually reviews its own and the superintendent's performance in pursuit of board goals. Other results include revised policies on board operations and procedures, a new job description for the superintendent and a policy on evaluation.

A key point is that evaluation helps give meaning to school board goal setting, a task that takes on an aura of futility in school systems where boards have no real means to examine the outcome. District 111 Supt. Donald Jenkins also points to the "opportunities for open communication" between himself and the board that evaluation and planning have fostered. Evaluation of the superintendent is one part of system-wide evaluation.

Of course, some school boards still have an unwritten policy not to evaluate their superintendents formally, except when the superintendent's contract is up for renewal. The trend, however, is to elevate the importance of superintendent evaluation by making it an integral part of the board's policy-making process. In doing this, the board recognizes that the superintendent's function is integral to effective school system governance. And superintendents in such school systems learn what their boards think of past performance, and what is expected of them in the future. ■

READERSHIP SURVEY

We need your help to make this publication better suit your needs. Please take a few minutes right now to tell us what you like most about Updating School Board Policies, what is least helpful, and how we can make it better. Thank you for your time and consideration. -- Phyllis Edelman, Editor

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For superintendent's only (Board Members: go to Question 11 please):

6. Would you like to continue to receive Administrative Angle ? ___Yes ___No

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Please tell us some details about yourself.

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14. How long have you served in this position?_____

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16. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your district?_____

17. Is your school district located in a predominately:
_____Urban area? _____Suburban area? _____Small town? _____Rural area?

_____

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Policy Adviser

If a teacher develops marketable computer software programs, does the teacher or the school system own those materials? Does he have the right to sell them?—*Assistant Superintendent, Michigan*

The 1976 Copyright Act was amended by Congress in 1980 to include a provision that owners of computer software programs have the same copyright claim as owners of other literary works. Technically, the creator of the program has rights of ownership and may sell the program. Nevertheless, in certain situations, this ownership may be questionable. It is best to check with your school attorney before making any determination about the ownership of the material.

A board policy statement, developed with the aid of your attorney *before* this question arises, could save your school system headaches. Your statement must take into consideration legal copyright restrictions to ownership of the teacher-produced materials *and* other factors, including:

- Whether the material was produced during school time, under compensation by the school system, and as part of the teacher's assignment.
- Whether the material was developed by the employee on his own time, but using school system property and facilities, and using information gathered in his assignment with the schools.
- Whether the material was developed by the employee on his own time, without expense, instruction, direction, or control by the board or any of the school system's administrators.
- Whether the materials were developed as part of an assignment under federal or state funded programs.

To encourage employees to develop educational computer software materials for public use within and outside the school system, many boards permit employees to use school system computer facilities and initiate agreements with the creator of the materials regarding rights for sale, which will be of profit to the school system and the creator.

In addition to developing a policy on copyright of computer materials, your board should develop a statement on the authorized use of school equipment, which spells out under what circumstances staff members may use school computers for personal use.

Other related policies to this area, which your board may want to develop, include royalties and professional research and publishing.

Using the EPS policy classification system, where would we code a policy statement on the removal of asbestos from the schools?—*Supervisor of School Facilities, Colorado*

A policy statement on this topic relates to two areas: facilities and school safety. Removal of asbestos may be considered as part of a facilities renovation program, code FK; the more important issue, however, is student safety. Therefore, we would recommend that a policy on this topic be coded under EB, Safety Program, with a possible cross-reference from code FK. ■

For more policy help

Sample policies and exhibits relating to the topics covered in this month's *Updating* are included in the school administrator's copy. These are:

Superintendent's appraisal: CBA, Qualifications and Duties of the Superintendent; AFB, Evaluation of the Superintendent; AFB-E, Evaluation of the Superintendent, two exhibits.

Copyright on computer materials: GCQB, Professional Research and Publishing.

Additional sample policies, regulations, and exhibits on these and other topics may be requested from the EPS Policy Information Clearinghouse, NSBA, 1055 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007.

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